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House Panel Says Nicaragua Manual Violated Law; CIA Mismanagement Seen

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WASHINGTON—The House Intelligence Committee concluded that a training manual for Nicaraguan insurgents was prepared with disregard to federal law and showed a lack of "command and control" by the Central Intelligence Agency in its operation of the covert war.

The Democratic majority said portions of the booklet violated a 1982 law prohibiting any effort to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. But the broader, bipartisan emphasis of the committee's findings focused on mismanagement and confusion in the agency.

"Negligence, not intent to violate the law, marked the manual's history," the panel said in a statement. Chairman Edward Boland (D., Mass.) described the project as "handled badly" and showing "extremely poor management."

Mr. Boland said it was "incredible" that no one in the CIA had read the document before it was first printed in the fall of 1983, and committee members complained of weaknesses in the chain-of-command within the agency.

The committee's statement marked the end of its inquiry into the controversial document, which provoked a political storm this

fall because of language interpreted by critics as advocating the assassination of Nicaraguan officials.

The document was part of a psychological warfare program initiated in mid-1983. Although the CIA's stated intention was to moderate tactics used by the insurgents, the 90-page booklet outlined a broad spectrum of terrorist actions including blackmail, kidnapping of officials, and coercion of civilians.

The committee found no "intentional violation" of a 1981 presidential executive order prohibiting U.S. participation in assassinations, but controversy remains over the manual's reference to "neutralizing" Nicaraguan officials. "I would read into neutralize an invitation to assassinate," said a senior Democratic committee member. But CIA Director William Casey has said there wasn't any intention to violate either the executive order or the 1982 law.

Rep. Boland stopped short of specifically criticizing Mr. Casey, but the CIA director's management of the entire Nicaraguan operation has eroded his support in both parties in Congress. "Management was always the problem," said a GOP leadership aide. "The signals have been sent," he said of congressional pressure on the White House to remove the director. "But they don't see the mileage (to be gained) . . . in getting someone else."

According to Intelligence Committee sources, Mr. Casey played a direct, personal role in operating the Nicaraguan program, with Duane Clairidge, the former head of the Latin American division, often reporting directly to him. A confidential report by the CIA inspector general's office in early 1983 said the then-deputy director for operations, John Stein, was virtually invisible in the chain of command, according to sources familiar with the document. Field personnel preoccupied with the daily operation of the war have complained of confusion about who was in control in specific cases.

Though the identity of the manual's author, known under the pseudonym John Kirkpatrick, has been kept secret, something is known about him from his past writings. One irony of the controversy is that he has emerged as a sympathetic figure for some most critical of the agency. A combat veteran of Korea, he served as an adviser to an armed propaganda team in Vietnam and has been an instructor in military psychology and leadership at West Point.

After the manual became public, his contract with the CIA was ended, but there is pressure in Congress for him to be reinstated, according to several sources who praised his work and faulted superiors in the agency for failing to better supervise the project.